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ABSTRACT

Two fire education programs for young children are described. The basic principles of both programs are the same: keep it short, make it fun, and get the children involved. The first program addresses what to do if clothes catch fire, teaching about matches, and exiting during a fire (crawling under smoke, raising windows, and unlocking doors). Instructional strategies and activities are outlined for three age groups in the second program: infants/toddlers, children 3-5 years old, and children 6-8 years old. Since infants/toddlers cannot care for themselves, concepts suggested to be taught to their caretakers include the dependence of infants/toddlers upon adults, the need for constant adult supervision, and the need to remove hazards to make childrens' environment safe. Activities for 3-5 year olds are suggested to foster the dual nature of fire (friendly but dangerous); stop/drop/roll technique to smother clothing fires; danger of matches; image of firefighter; and simple fire escape procedures. In addition to reinforcing the previous concepts, it is suggested that 6-8 year olds be taught basic components of fire, role and operation of the fire department, home/community hazards (such as flammable liquids, lighters, and matches), and how to correctly report a fire. (Author/JN)

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YOUNG CHILDREN

A NEW TARGET FOR PUBLIC FIRE EDUCATION

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**YOUNG CHILDREN:
A New Target for
Public Fire Education**

**Federal Emergency Management Agency
U. S. Fire Administration
Office of Planning and Education
August 1979**

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TO THE READER

Fire Education has long been aimed at elementary school students in the fifth grade and up. It has been shown, however, that basic fire education can be taught to children in the three-to-eight age group.

The following article describes two fire education programs for young children. The basic principles behind both programs are the same: keep it short, make it fun, and get the children involved.

The Public Education Office of the U.S. Fire Administration is making this booklet available to show you options for fire safety education for young children. It is hoped that by educating children early about fire safety, we can make progress in reducing this nation's fire problems.

Richard Strother
Associate Administrator
U.S. Fire Administration

Brian stands in front of his classmates at the day care center. A strip of red felt in the shape of a flame is fastened to his shirt pocket.

"OK, Brian, let's see what you do if your clothes catch on fire," his teacher says.

Quickly, Brian drops to the floor, rolls over, and smiles as the red flame falls from his shirt. "Remember," the teacher says as she turns to the class, "A burn is worse than the sting of 1,000 bees."

* * *

INTRODUCTION

This scene is being repeated across the nation as teachers, day care center leaders, firefighters, and other adults are teaching young children about fire safety.

But what's unusual about this scene is that the children learning fire safety are pre-school age. Some, in fact, are as young as three years old.

In the past, elementary school students -- particularly fifth graders -- were the primary target group for fire education. Today it is believed the basics of fire education can be taught to younger children in the three-to-eight age group. Educators now feel that when fire education begins at an early age, children develop good fire safety habits that stay with them during their adult lives.

"Young children cannot learn about the technical aspects of fire, but they can learn about the dangers of fire, simple fire prevention, and what to do in the case of fire," says Polly Condon, a day care licensing official with the Georgia Department of Human Resources, who has developed a public education program for pre-schoolers.

"The process is slow, but potentially offers the best way to reduce the many deaths and injuries children suffer each year in fires," she says.

Condon's program in Georgia and another developed by Nancy Dennis, a fire education specialist at Oklahoma State University, are based on the premise that fire education for young children should be short, simple, and fun.

The best way to do that, they suggest, is by getting children involved in the education process by using techniques such as songs, poems, and play-acting along with picture books, movies, and slide shows.

"We should strive to get the children involved in learning behavioral skills that are necessary in fire prevention," says Dennis.

Since both programs are aimed at children in the three-to-eight age group, the material has mostly been limited to basic skills such as stop, drop, and roll, proper use of matches, and home exit procedures.

OKLAHOMA:
MAKING IT FUN

"My whole philosophy of fire education can be stated in one word: fun," says Nancy Dennis. "Fire education need not be boring. Children respond better to material that's interesting and fun for them."

Dennis became interested in fire education for pre-school children in 1975 when she was writing a term paper at Oklahoma State University. "I began looking around for material for pre-school children and I saw there was a gap."

So Dennis began creating her own program. She designed games, activities, and songs within the three fundamental concepts of fire education.

Then, she started teaching Oklahoma firefighters how to present the material to children. She stressed that pre-school children, especially those living in a one-parent family, welcome male firefighters and are anxious to learn from them. Her program, which was partially funded by a grant from the Office of Planning and Education at the U.S. Fire Administration, was well received among the fire educators she visited.

The following is a sample of some of the techniques she suggests in teaching fire education to pre-school children:

Stop, Drop, and Roll

Many young children are severely burned each year when their clothing catches on fire. Research has shown that a proper reaction to clothing ignition can reduce the severity

of the injury. A child's instinctive reaction to a clothing fire is to run. They must be taught to stop, drop, and roll when their clothing catches fire. This reaction not only smothers the fire but it also helps keep flames away from a child's face.

Dennis suggests these approaches for teaching children how to react:

1. Begin discussing stop, drop, and roll by asking questions such as, "How many of you have on pants?" or "Who has on a dress or jeans?" The children should recognize that their clothing will burn. The teacher should then say, "Everything we have on will burn."
2. The teacher should demonstrate stop, drop, and roll, telling the students that this is what they should do if their clothing ever catches on fire.
3. Students themselves should actually practice the skill. One idea Dennis suggests is placing a felt "flame" on the child's clothes. The child should stop, drop, and roll and the flame will fall off.

Other activities to teach stop, drop, and roll may include having the children draw pictures of a clothing fire sequence or letting the children make paper flames cut from construction paper.

"The most important thing is getting the kids themselves to practice stop, drop, and roll rather than just watching the teacher demonstrate the technique," Dennis concludes.

Teaching About Matches

A wide range of philosophies exist among parents and educators on how to teach children about matches. Dennis notes, "There is no one 'right' philosophy. The most important factor is that the behavior, or philosophy chosen

by the parent or educator, is conveyed to the child and enforced consistently. The child must know what is expected."

Dennis lists four education philosophies on matches and children:

1. Matches aren't for children. This approach -- hands off, never play with matches -- is most strongly supported for very young children who have no reason to use a match. Most of these children are under five years old and usually don't have the physical dexterity to make a match work.

The problem with this approach, she says, is that it leaves no room for children from four to six years old to explore their natural fascination with matches. If children want to play with matches, another approach should be used, she advises.

2. A match is a tool. Children should be made aware of the use and function of matches and fire. The match should be presented as a TOOL having a specific function and the use of a match for other purposes should be presented as improper use of the TOOL.

3. Use matches only with adult supervision. This approach may be coupled with a match is a tool but takes into consideration the match fascination of young children, Dennis says. With this philosophy, a child is free to "play with matches" but only in the presence of a consenting adult.

4. Match use saturation. In this approach, a child is forced to strike a maximum of 200 matches before being allowed to stop. This saturates the child's curiosity about matches and forces the child to no longer look upon a match as a "fun" thing since the parent forced the child to continue striking matches.

Crawl Under Smoke

Home exit procedures are skills and behaviors young

children can learn, Dennis says. The skills include physical abilities such as unlocking doors and raising windows.

"Positive information is important. In an emergency situation there is no time for confusion between right and wrong behavior. Use only do's, no don'ts," she says.

"There are two basic actions for children in a fire situation which are almost always correct," Dennis says. "One is get down low and crawl under smoke and the other is to go to a window. The most important element of teaching home exit procedures is that children have a clear plan to follow."

Dennis suggests that teachers introduce the topic of home fire exits by using one of the several story books on the market today. (She uses "Bambi" and "Sam the Fire Cat.")

Then, she advises teachers to actually practice home exit procedures and skills with the children. One technique for practicing the skill is having several children stand in a line facing each other and hold black crepe paper or fabric streamers and having other children crawl under the streamers, which represent smoke.

Children can also practice manipulating various types of door locks, opening a window, and getting out of a window properly.

In each of the three areas -- stop, drop, and roll, proper use of matches, and home exit procedures -- Dennis suggests a variety of teaching aids such as books, filmstrips, movies, and flannel board stories.

GEORGIA:
THE DAY CARE APPROACH

The Georgia state legislature passed a law in 1975 requiring day care centers to comply with state fire codes, thus creating the need for a program to explain those regulations to day care center leaders. Officials and fire educators in the state also realized that these day care center workers could be a valuable resource in teaching young children and parents about fire safety since the state has 15,000 licensed centers which serve more than 80,000 children each day.

Polly Condon, a day care licensing official, and George Lanier, fire marshal of the Rome, Ga. Fire Department, teamed up to design and conduct a program to prepare adults to teach fire education to pre-school children.

Condon designed her program for three age groups: infants and toddlers, children 3-5 years old and children 6-8 years old. While activities and concepts differ with the various age groups, Condon emphasized that teachers must use specific, concrete language that children can understand. For example, Condon suggested that teachers talk about burns by saying, "The burn is worse than a sting of 1,000 bees." Children can relate to that concept, she says, because many of them have actually been stung by bees.

Here are samples of some activities and concepts that Condon suggests:

Infants and Toddlers: Since infants and toddlers cannot care for themselves, the responsibility for their fire safety rests with adult caregivers (parents, teachers, babysitters, and those who take care of children out of the home).

Condon lists three key concepts to be taught to care-

givers of infants and toddlers: (1) the dependence of infants and toddlers upon adults; (2) the need for constant adult supervision; and (3) the need to remove hazards to make the child's environment safe.

Children 3-5 Years Old: Caregivers can begin teaching 3-5 year-old children about fire. Simple songs, finger plays, picture books, flannel boards, role play, and dramatization can be used to teach and reinforce fire safety concepts. Children of this age group should be introduced to the following fire safety concepts: (1) the dual nature of fire, which can be "friendly," but can also hurt; (2) the stop, drop, and roll technique to smother clothing fires; (3) matches aren't for children and are not toys; (4) the image of the firefighter as a friend and community helper; (5) simple fire escape procedures.

Condon encourages programs on these topics in day care centers, play school, kindergartens, school, churches, etc.

Children 6-8 Years Old: Condon says officials should organize fire safety education classes for teachers. Information provided to children of this age is a review and expansion of the concepts covered in the 3-5 age group. More detail is provided and the following additional concepts are taught:

- basic components of fire
- the fire department - how it operates - what firemen do - fire department equipment
- home and community hazards, such as blasting caps, flammable liquids, matches, lighters, etc.

Children should also learn what to do in the case of fire such as escape/fire drills, how to extinguish someone else's clothing, and how to report a fire.

Play It Safe

In order to teach the concepts, Condon suggests a variety of activities including:

1. Walk to the nearest fire alarm box.
2. Encourage block work; build a city including a fire station and police station.
3. Construct a fire engine from large cardboard boxes or orange crates; tools or parts may be painted on or added as children recognize the need for them.
4. Organize a dramatic play such as:
 - a) locating a fire in a room
 - b) reporting a fire
 - c) answering a fire call
 - d) jumping into fire clothes.

FINDING PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN AND CAREGIVERS

Public fire educators can easily locate pre-school children and caregivers, according to Dennis and Condon. Potential pre-school audiences are found in churches, park programs, day care centers, vacation Bible schools, community centers, and the YMCA. In addition to day care center workers and parents, potential caregivers include babysitter clinics, home economics classes, and scout groups.

TEACHING TIPS

Here are more tips for teaching fire safety to pre-schoolers from Nancy Dennis and Polly Condon:

SIT ON THE FLOOR. Children relate better in an informal setting.

TRY TO WORK WITH SMALL GROUPS. Four small groups of ten children are better than one large group of forty.

LIMIT THE AMOUNT OF INFORMATION. It's better to teach one basic principle, such as stop, drop, and roll, than to flood children with several ideas at once.

DEMONSTRATE. The message is more effective when the teacher actually acts-out the technique being taught.

WEAR COMFORTABLE CLOTHING. Demonstrating stop, drop, and roll involves getting on the floor. A pair of overalls or a comfortable shirt and a pair of slacks are advisable.

GET THE CHILDREN INVOLVED. Have them role-play, let them practice exit procedures, etc. Children learn more when they take part in the learning.

USE POSITIVE LANGUAGE. Say, "Matches are tools," rather than "Don't use matches." Tests have shown that negative language is not as effective for children as positive information.

USE CONCRETE LANGUAGE WHENEVER POSSIBLE. It is better to say, "A burn is worse than the sting of 1,000 bees," rather than "A burn hurts."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like more information on public fire education programs for pre-school children, you may call or write:

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